# SIR WILLIAM WHITLA, M.A., M.D., D.SC., LL.D.,

Pro-Chancellor and Emeritus Professor of Materia Medica, Queen's University, Belfast; Consulting Physician, Royal Victoria Hospital; Honorary Physician in Ireland to His Majesty the King.

BRITISH medicine has lost a remarkable and fascinating personality.

Sir William was born in Monaghan in 1851. Shortly after leaving school he came to Belfast as an apprentice to the leading firm of dispensing chemists, Wheeler & Whitaker. He soon decided on reading for the medical profession, and when his apprenticeship was completed he entered Queen's University. His college career, a brilliant one, terminated in 1877, when he obtained his M.D. with first-class honours and a gold medal.

Soon afterwards he was appointed resident medical officer and superintendent of the Royal Hospital. His exceptional ability both as a physician and an administrator soon became evident. He quickly revolutionized the working of the whole institution.

When his term of office came to an end he decided to commence practice in Belfast. He was already so favourably known that his success was instantaneous. Professor Gordon was so deeply impressed by his ability that he invited him to assist him at all his private operations. At that time, indeed, his bent was chiefly surgical. He rapidly developed an extensive general practice, and soon perceived that his future lay in medicine.

It is doubtful if any medical man ever gained and maintained the confidence, trust, and affection of his patients in a higher degree than William Whitla.

His appointment as physician to the Royal Hospital gave him an opportunity to demonstrate his ability as a clinical teacher, and he soon attracted a large clinical class.

In the midst of his hospital work and an extensive and exacting practice, he turned his attention to literature. He wrote his "Materia Medica and Therapeutics," which was at once a pronounced success. In this work the value of his early training as a chemist was very evident. It was the first textbook to reproduce woodcuts of pestle and mortar, measure-glasses, and other apparatus used by dispensers. The book met the requirements of the dispensing chemist and the qualified medical man. The section on non-official remedies proved a special attraction. The book had an enormous sale. The twelfth edition, revised and edited by Dr. Gunn of Oxford, happily reached him about two months before his death. He displayed it to his friends with natural pride.

The resignation of the Chair of Materia Medica by Professor Seaton Reid paved the way for his appointment as a professor in Queen's College. He soon breathed new life into the teaching of the dry and difficult subject. His fame and popularity rose still higher.

An indefatigable worker, he next produced that remarkable book, "The Dictionary of Treatment." His versatility and the extent of his reading may be gauged from the fact that every article in the first edition was written by himself.

The success of this work was immense. It was published simultaneously in England and America. The English edition of eight thousand copies was sold out within nine months; two thousand of the American edition were imported into this country to meet the immediate demand. The book met a definite want, and was soon to be found on the bookshelf of almost every general practitioner. A specially-bound volume of the Chinese edition was amongst his most treasured possessions.

Apart from his medical knowledge, Sir William Whitla was a widely-read and cultured man. He knowledge of English literature was amazing. He was one of the greatest living Shakespearean scholars. The annual visits of Sir Frank Benson and his company to Belfast were almost red-letter days to him. Those who were privileged to participate in the delightful suppers which he gave to the leading members of that company can never forget the charming atmosphere of that hospitable table.

Appreciation of his merits by those best qualified to judge is indicated by the number of honorary degrees conferred upon him, which included M.A., R.U.I.; LL.D., Glasgow; M.D., Dublin; D.Sc., Q.U.B., and by King Edward, who included his name for a knighthood in his list of Birthday Honours.

Sir William was an intimate friend of the late Sir Donald Currie, and was largely responsible for his magnificent gift of £20,000 to Queen's College, Belfast.

A really great man, with a strikingly picturesque mind, he was a wonderful raconteur; his stories were innumerable, and were recorded with a wealth of detail that made him a unique and fascinating companion.

On the difficult problems connected with education he was a recognized authority. He was an early advocate of the establishment of a university at Belfast.

It was a fitting tribute that he should have been elected as the first represenative of the Queen's University of Belfast in the Imperial Parliament, and one of its Pro-Chancellors.

Sir William was a widely-travelled man; his descriptions of Russia and of the famous world fair at Nizhniy-Novgorod, of Palestine, of Italy, Canada, and America, were an educational treat.

Members of the British Medical Association will long remember his presidency on the occasion of the annual meeting in Belfast in 1909. His bounteous hospitality, brilliant garden-party, and a presentation to each member who attended the meeting of his recently-published book, "A Dictionary of Medicine," are not easily forgotten.

A man of wonderful vision, he never did anything in a small way; he never looked for praise or reward.

The Medical Institute, the home of the Ulster Medical Society, contains a bronze plate with the following inscription: "This building was erected, equipped, and presented to the Ulster Medical Society by Sir William Whitla, M.D." The foundation stone was laid by Peter Redfern, M.D., on the 12th April, 1902. The building was declared open by His Excellency the Earl of Dudley, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, on the 26th November following.

The cost of the building had exceeded £6,000. When one tried to thank him, he simply replied, "I owe it to the profession; they gave me the money for my book."

A man of deep religious conviction, his Bible was his constant companion. The tale of his private benefactions will never be known, but no one in real distress ever applied to him in vain.

For almost four years he has been unable to leave his room; his mental powers and his memory remained almost perfect to the last. His devoted wife, Lady Ada Whitla, predeceased him by eighteen months.

A great man, a very great man, has gone to his long rest; a rest which he earnestly desired and for which he patiently waited. William Whitla has not lived in vain.

A. B. MITCHELL.

# Some Recent Advances in the Diagnosis and Treatment of Pulmonary Tuberculosis

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THE title of my paper might be taken as a challenge, so to disarm criticism I will state at once that the advances in diagnosis are entirely of a technical nature.

Nothing has taken the place of a skilfully elicited case-history and a full and painstaking examination of the symptoms of the patient. The temperature, pulse-rate, and weight-curve remain valuable guides in assessing the activity of the disease, although more delicate tests, such as the blood-sedimentation rate or the monocyte count, are undoubtedly improved methods of measuring slight degrees of toxæmia.

The blood-sedimentation rate, which is now widely used for the diagnosis and control of treatment of tuberculosis, is a modern adaptation of a fact known for many hundreds of years. The old physicians, when they bled a patient, often noted that the serum separated very rapidly from the clot in cases of fever. This was spoken of as the "buffy coat," and the phenomenon is due to an alteration of the proportions of serum fibrogen, serum globumin, and serum albumin in the blood-serum. In 1918 Fahræus rediscovered this long-forgotten phenomenon, and a simple technique has been elaborated for measuring the fall of the red cells in the citrated blood-serum of the patient. Of course the test is not in any way specific for tuberculosis, as it is positive in many inflammatory and wasting conditions. It is, however, of great value in assessing the degree of toxæmia when the temperature is normal. Although not specific, the blood-sedimentation test has also a definite value in diagnosis, as there may be a marked deviation from the normal in early phthisis. The sedimentation rate is usually normal in bronchitis, asthma, and pulmonary fibrosis, also in arrested or healed pulmonary tuberculosis.